

THE
SOVIET-FINNISH
CAMPAIGN

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THREEPENCE

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December 1st, 1939 to March 13th, 1940

by

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THE most insanely dangerous feature of our foreign policy during the last twenty years has been our vilification and deliberate estrangement and provocation of the Soviet Government. Major Hooper's book *Through Soviet Russia in 1937*, published by himself at his own risk and expense, was the first book available at a popular price which gave us the simple truth about daily life there. But we still senselessly underrated the formidable military power of the U.S.S.R., and described the Finland Affair not only as a crime on Russia's part but as a demonstration of her incompetence in modern warfare.

In exposing this silly fiction, Major Hooper has done us another service of first-rate social and military importance.

BERNARD SHAW.

FINLAND (SOVIET-FINNISH CAMPAIGN)



Railways —————
 Road = = = = =
 Frontiers - - - - -

English Miles
 0 50 100 150 200

MAP OF THE KARELIA ISTHMUS
 (Mannerheim Line) see page 23

THE SOVIET-FINNISH CAMPAIGN

By MAJOR A. S. HOOPER

WAR is so highly developed in these days of modern science that success depends less than formerly on individual valour and organised man power, and much more on the most up-to-date scientific equipment. Hence a modern army must have behind it the whole economic resources of the nation. The armed forces are the cold chisel which the heavy hammer of industry pounds to victory. Had China possessed the hammer of a modern industry the cold chisel of her heroic army would have driven her enemy, Japan, into the sea a year or more ago.

This has been clearly shown in the present War when the weight of Nazi Germany rapidly overcame the small nations; in the case of Poland in a matter of weeks and in that of Holland and Belgium, a few days. It needs no military training to see this obvious truth. Why, then, should the Finnish rulers, on the advice of their military leaders, have decided to resort to arms, rather than accept the changes in frontier proposed by the Soviet Union? Alone Finland had no hope of resisting, with any possibility of success, the whole weight of the U.S.S.R. with its mighty modern industry, its population of 170 millions, and its Red Army not involved in any war along the whole length of its frontier in Europe and Asia. Why, then, did the Finnish leaders rush in where Hitler feared to tread?

The Red Army had already shown its power in modern war by gaining two resounding victories over the Japanese, both on ground of Japan's choice; at Lake Hassan in Manchuria in 1938, and at Khalkhyn Gol in Mongolia in September, 1939, when the 6th Japanese Army was destroyed. What induced the Commander of the Finnish Army, Baron Mannerheim, a soldier by training and experience, to allow Finland to commit, apparently, national suicide?

"Finland is the key to Leningrad and Leningrad is the key to Moscow," wrote *The Times* in 1919, and ever since the end of foreign intervention in Soviet Russia, in 1922, a defence system had been built up on the Karelian Isthmus in Finland that could be used as a jumping-off ground, a "spring-board" for other military powers. Up to the date of the signing of the Soviet-

German Non-Aggression Treaty in Moscow in 1939, Nazi Germany was the military force behind the Finnish spearhead.

Were the rulers of Finland now hoping for, and counting on, the military and industrial might of Great Britain and France, with the financial goodwill of the U.S.A.?

Baron Mannerheim's plan was to use the Finnish Army in a defensive war during the bitter Finnish winter and to wear down the Red Army attacks until the change over to the offensive could be achieved in the summer months with the help of the armed forces of other Powers. After the campaign was over, Mr. Chamberlain disclosed that Mannerheim had asked for 30,000 British troops to be sent in May, but that the British Government had collected a force of 100,000 which would be ready for despatch at an earlier date than that requested by Mannerheim.

No country could be more suitable than Finland for such a task. Her sea frontiers are well protected by small islands and these had been fortified with modern weapons. These fortresses not only protected her own coast but were a direct menace to Soviet naval power in the Gulf of Finland with its key fortress—the island of Kronstadt. At this period (November, 1939) the Soviet Union had only recently taken over naval bases in the Baltic States and none of these had as yet been fortified. The Finnish communications by sea in the Gulf of Bothnia were distant and not easily attacked. In the north in the Arctic was the harbour of Petsamo which might be used as a base against Soviet shipping by "guest" submarines.

But Finland's greatest asset for defence was the very nature of the country itself. In the south it consists entirely of lakes and forests and in the north of rocky ridges and forests. There are more than 60,000 lakes in Finland; an impossible country in which to deploy troops and equally impossible to keep them supplied, except by rail. The climate is exceptionally cold, the Arctic circle cutting through the northern half of the country. In the winter, darkness, except for one hour in the north and three in the south, combined with a snowfall of some four to six feet deep, makes all offensive operations of a war of movement seem impossible.

In addition to what nature had given them, the Finnish High Command had at its disposal a railway system, which, though insufficient for her peace-time needs, was yet invaluable in war, for it could not only supply her front line with ease, but had excellent lateral lines for defence. These railways were of great importance in the coming campaign. The Red Army had to operate on exterior strategic lines with only the one Leningrad-Murmansk railway for the use of all its forces operating on the 600 mile Eastern Frontier of Finland, and for the Karelian

Isthmus, two lines which converged and passed over the one bridge over the River Neva at Leningrad.

But the keystone to the Finnish defensive arch was the famous Mannerheim Line on the Karelian Isthmus based on the second largest industrial town in Finland, Viborg (Viipuri). The right of this formidable system of fortifications rested on the sea in the Gulf of Finland, and its left on Lake Ladoga. The forward zone was within 21 miles of Leningrad, the second largest city in the U.S.S.R. with a population of over three million inhabitants. If, as Napoleon had said, "Antwerp is a pistol held at England's head," what was the Mannerheim Line to the Soviet Union in these days of modern long-range artillery?

The Mannerheim Line had been constructed with the best military advice, including that of the British General, Sir Walter Kirke, who had given it a final inspection in June, 1939. In the early Finnish communiques it was referred to as the Kirke-Maginot Line. Based on a plan similar to that of the Maginot Line, it incorporated what that passive defence system lacked, the ideas of the more active defence of the Siegfried Line. Thus, it could be used when the time was ripe, for offensive action; as visualised in the "Hoffman" plan, cherished by Germany for her Baltic invasion of the U.S.S.R. up to August, 1939.

There were three zones in this system. The forward zone of a depth varying from three to eight miles and consisting of concrete block-houses and pill-boxes, equipped with machine-guns, anti-tank guns and field artillery, and guarded by barbed wire, anti-tank traps and land mines.

The second zone, the main line of defence, was some 70 miles in length, and ran from its right on the coast fortress of Koivisto, across Lake Muolaa, then along the Vuoksi waterway and finishing with its left at the fortress of Taipale at the mouth of that river on Lake Ladoga. It was seven miles in depth except in the lake districts, where it narrowed to two miles. The fortifications of this section were two-storied in depth, embedded in the ground and constructed of reinforced concrete and armour plate. Armed with heavy artillery, each fort was capable of independent defensive action. All were protected by barbed wire, trenches, tank traps and land mines. There were in all 350 two-storey reinforced concrete underground forts and 2,257 granite emplacements.

The third zone was centred on the rail junction and industrial town of Viborg and was a special fortified area of some 25 miles in circumference.

If military thought considered the French Maginot Line impregnable from frontal assault, and the German Command evidently did think so or they would not have gone round it

through Belgium as they did, this Mannerheim Line with both its flanks secure would have been even more so.

North of Lake Ladoga there ran an extension of the fortified line from Sortavala to Suojarvi and still further north the railway Joensuu-Nurmes-Oulu was well protected. The capital of Finland, Helsinki, and the port Abo had each their own fortified systems.

The task of the Finnish Army was to hold this line throughout the winter, and the even more difficult period for the attacker, during the thaw of spring. Baron Mannerheim was in command. His previous war experience had included the Finnish Civil War in 1919, when, with the powerful help of the German forces he had defeated the Finnish Red Army. He presumed that his army could beat off all attacks in the winter months and that he would require no foreign aid until May, that is, until six months after the outbreak of hostilities. If the Red Army were to waste its energy and wear itself out in attacks in the winter, May would be the month to take over the initiative, to pass from defensive to offensive action.

This anticipation was not unreasonable in view of the climatic and geographical conditions, supplemented by the great advantage given to the defence by the latest developments of military science in fortifications.

The Red Army had to accept the difficulties and take action. It is not quite a fair comparison in historic parallels of a major power at war with a smaller one, to recall the Boer War. In that war, time was not an essential factor. That war could and did take three years. The whole weight of the British Empire was able to exert relentless pressure in a leisurely fashion, for the Boer Republics had no industries and were isolated. Intervention by any other power was made impossible by the invincible might of the British Navy.

But in Finland time was the vital factor for the Red Army. The campaign had to be completed successfully, not by May, but by late March before the spring thaw set in. This thaw would tend to immobilise all activity on both sides until it was over. With an unfinished campaign on her hands the U.S.S.R. had to face the possible danger of attacks from Great Britain, France and Sweden in the north, aided possibly by an attack by Great Britain, France and Turkey in the south on her oilfields. A glance at the press of those countries at this period shows how potential the danger actually was.

The Soviet forces were placed under the command of General Meretskov, at that time Commander of the Leningrad Garrison. His problem was not an easy one, for there were few variants open to him. But he held one great advantage over his opponent—the power the defence always surrenders to the offence—the

initiative. Whatever plan the Red Commander might make, Mannerheim would have to adjust his forces to meet that plan, would have to conform to the movements of his enemy.

To destroy the Finnish resistance there were three possible directions in which Meretskov could bring the weight of the main Red attack and these three alternatives are broadly as follows:— First, on the south coast of Finland; second, to destroy the Mannerheim Line on the Karelian Isthmus; third, to attack through the so-called “waist-line” from Finland’s eastern frontier.

Superficially, the first course, an invasion of the South Coast of Finland, might appear feasible in view of the comparatively overwhelming naval power possessed by the Soviet Command. Landings in force could become in time an army which might be able to sever the capital Helsinki from the Mannerheim Line headquarters at Viborg and the Red Army could march into the heart of industrial Finland, which lay mostly in the south. But, as *The Times* military correspondent stated, the Finnish coast line is the most strongly fortified in Europe. The Finns could repel these landings. Nelson said that only a fool attacks forts with ships, as we ourselves have sometimes forgotten to our cost. But even if in some parts landings had been successful, Mannerheim could have easily defeated them in detail with the aid of the railway running parallel to the coast. But the decisive argument against such a course of action was that the lines of communication back to the base would have been impossible. These lines would have been at first, for a period by sea, then for a period across the ice of the frozen sea, and then back to a period by sea again in the spring, with intervals between the freezing and thawing, during which there would be practically no communication.

The second alternative, attacking the Mannerheim Line, meant the taking by frontal attack a modern fortified line with both flanks secure on the sea, for Lake Ladoga is the biggest lake in Europe, and for this purpose equivalent to a sea. The British Official History of the last war stated that to overwhelm modern defence the attacker should have a minimum superiority of three to one over the defence. Modern military thought had tended to raise this, with the development of the defensive arms, to four, and even five to one. For the U.S.S.R. to produce this in men and arms was not a difficult problem, but the question of bringing up this immense weight of men and material to the decisive area was not so easy of solution. And even then, when this great force was accumulated, the Karelian Isthmus gave the attacker no liberty of manoeuvre, no elbow room. The mighty armies of France and Germany faced each other on the French frontier for eight months and neither had taken one single step

to develop any major direct attack on the other. There they had room to make feints, to draw off the enemy and employ all the ruses to deceive the enemy as to the point of the real blow. In the Karelian Isthmus the Red Army had no choice but a purely frontal attack; and that to be delivered from an extremely cramped position. The lines to supply the immense force necessary were only two railways; and 22 miles from the front these passed over a single bridge in Leningrad. This defile of a bridge was exposed to long-range artillery fire, as well as to attacks from the air.

The third alternative, invading Finland from the East, was to deliver the main blow from the 600-mile frontier which ran north to the Arctic. Here was indeed liberty of manoeuvre enough but there were no lines of communication branching out from the main railway Leningrad-Murmansk. The aim of this advance against the "waist-line" of Finland from the east as well as from the north would have, as its first objective, the railway that runs from Tornio on the Swedish frontier, through Kemi, Oulu, Kontiomaki, Nurmes, Joensuu to Sortovalva and Viborg. A valuable line to reach, as it would force supplies from abroad to come by sea through Sweden and Abo (Turku). It would cut Finland in two. But the northern half was barren and of little military value compared with the richer industrial southern half. Moreover, the capture of this line would have been by no means disastrous to the Finns, for they could fight a series of defensive actions to their great advantage all through Finland with the aid of the internal railway system, as long as their main line Helsinki-Viborg was free, and as long as the Mannerheim Line was intact. Nothing would have suited the Finns better than to see the Red Army entangled in a long drawn-out struggle, whilst they, the Finns, used those guerilla tactics that the Boer leader, de Wet, employed with such success in the South African War, in somewhat similar circumstances. In this case too, the initial movements of the Red Forces would have to be made in Arctic darkness, in intense cold, in snow at least four feet deep and no communications except tracks over snow, through forests, and in most cases over a hundred miles from the nearest railhead. Obviously, to complete a campaign and force Finland to sue for peace by April, using this line of advance, was impossible.

General Meretskov decided to take the Mannerheim Line. This would need, with the means at his disposal, two clear months to bring up the necessary troops and material for the task. Hence no major operation could take place on this front until February 1st, 1940. This would leave almost two clear months for the main battle to defeat and crush the forces holding

the Mannerheim Line, before the thaw set in, which generally occurred in the latter days of March.

Meanwhile, to cover his real intention, he decided to launch a series of attacks on the Finnish "waist-line" from the eastern frontier, based on the Leningrad-Murmansk railway, to act as a threat to the Oulu-Sortavala line. These attacks were to draw off as many Finnish reserves as possible and to keep them occupied, and also to deceive the enemy as to the direction of the main offensive. If the deception was carried out properly, the Finns would have great difficulty in relieving the exhausted front line on the Karelian Isthmus when the big and continuous attack was opened there.

The further the Finns were drawn from their railheads in the northern regions, the harder it would be for them to extricate themselves from the fighting. But the key of the plan was that these attacks must appear so real and the threat so imminent that the deception could be kept up for two months.

Two immediate preliminary actions were needed to operate this plan. The first was to take the forward zone of the Mannerheim Line in order to remove the artillery and air threat against the Soviet base at Leningrad and to provide space for the amassing of the forces for the great attack. The second was to take Petsamo, the only port the Finns possessed in the Arctic north, to prevent the possibility of intervention by a naval power.

Owing to the excellent publicity methods of the Nazi system, the public have come to the conclusion that modern wars will all be fought on the "Blitzkrieg" basis, the lightning attack, or the principle of the short, sharp, sudden stab. But the Red Army does not follow this principle, although by no means undervaluing the necessity of speed and audacity in war.

To get a clearer picture of Meretskov's plan it may be as well to quote from Max Werner's "Military Strength of the Powers" in regard to the Red Army's strength (pp. 115-6).

"The sudden surprise attack, the dream of obtaining a lightning decision in war, finds no place in Red strategy. . . . Unlike modern German strategy, Red strategy refuses to stake all on obtaining a quick decision. . . . A Soviet military expert writes as follows:—'Modern warfare is not like a boxing match in which the better man knocks out his opponent suddenly with one blow. In war an uninterrupted flow of strength and energy is necessary in order to beat the enemy to his knees.'

"Red strategy reckons with the possibility of steady growing resistance on the part of the enemy; it is the strategy of endurance."

The Soviet military writer says: "Withdrawing to his own strategic base the enemy has more time to rally and concentrate his forces, and in the upshot he may prove stronger than the first

wave of the attacking forces, unless the latter have drawn on their reserves."

These principles of Red strategy should be kept in mind as they came out clearly in this campaign as will be seen later.

Such then was the strategical situation and the plan of attack by General Meretskov when the campaign opened on December 1st, 1939.

A word about those maligned gentlemen, the war correspondents in Finland. They have been abused and called "arm-chair critics," "amateur strategists," to which the Americans added "typewriter generals." The term "Finnish correspondent" became a joke. One of them wrote, rather ruefully, after the campaign was over: "Nobody, of course, believes anything they hear from Finland." In fairness to these journalists, it should be pointed out that, as most of the men of military training and experience were busy with the war in Western Europe, the press authorities sent out journalists to write up the Finnish war. Now the training of a journalist is to provide news from a sensational and vivid angle for a press-fed public, but this is fatal for a clear military analysis, which should be objective to be accurate. Besides, journalists are not trained in military thought and seldom are they students of military history. One well-known Sunday newspaper even sent a woman. The result was that the military correspondents, back in England, had the greatest difficulty in arriving at any correct appreciation of the military situation and were often led to draw quite incorrect conclusions. Journalists, like politicians, are apt to forget that wars are won by deeds, not words.

But the Finnish High Command was partly to blame. One American journalist, writing for his paper said: "It is impossible to give a rounded summary of this war's progress to date (January 30th, 1940), since no correspondent knows more than a fraction of what happened in any sector . . . the Finnish High Command has taken pains that no correspondent should witness a major engagement, and not one has seen a large-scale clash between Finnish and Russian forces. Thus it happens that this is an almost unprecedented secret war and what correspondents see is most carefully restricted long before anything they write comes beneath the censor's pencil . . . of course, the Finnish High Command has its own reasons for these restrictions and perhaps foremost is Field-Marshal Baron Mannerheim's method of waging war with an absolute secrecy of strategy. . . . It is also evident that Finnish losses and casualties have been systematically masked."

Thus correspondents had to rely on Finnish military bulletins. The French in the Napoleonic wars coined the phrase "to lie

like a bulletin." General Wallenius, who commanded the forces defending the Finnish northern sectors, had been a journalist himself at one time. But Mannerheim, towards the end of the campaign, tightened up control of the censorship "to avoid" as the *Daily Telegraph* put it, "misguided enthusiasts reporting a smashing Finnish victory two or three times a week." This policy had become dangerous to the Finnish cause, for even the High Command itself seemed to have fallen victim to its own propaganda. By underrating their enemy they lulled themselves into a false sense of security and were "hoist on their own petard."

The only news from the Soviet side was the official communiques, and these were so short and laconic that they had no publicity value, not even as denials.

The Finnish forces were estimated at 600,000 maximum, and this was possible with a "mobilisation potential of 15 per cent of the population." The regular army was 30,000 men, highly trained in such a manner as to form cadres for expansion, and a Schutz corps organised by Mannerheim in 1920 after the Civil War. This corps had a strong resemblance to the Nazi S.A. troops and was 200,000 strong. The "Lotte Svaard" of about 80,000 women, an auxiliary to the Schutz corps, was for the purpose of relieving men of military duties in the rear. The army was well equipped, its artillery, including the anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, being supplied by the famous Swedish firm Bofors, who had established a branch in Finland. There were also two armament factories, two munition works, a powder factory and an aeroplane factory.

The air force was estimated at 600 planes, but its aerodromes were available for an expansion to 2,000. However, the "guest" fleet never came up to their expectations, only 350 planes arriving from other countries. Britain sent 101, France 179, Sweden, Italy and Spain making up the rest of the total.

The other arms sent to Finland for the campaign included 1,500 guns, 6,000 machine-guns, 100,000 rifles, 650,000 hand-grenades, and 2½ million shells.

No figures can be obtained of the Red forces which took part in the campaign, but the number of infantry divisions must lie between 20 and 22. Thus the number of Red troops engaged was a very small portion of their immense standing army.

The campaign opened on December 1st by a bombardment of Helsinki's air-port and harbour. At the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland, the Finnish islands were occupied by Red forces. These islands were too far from their coast for the Finns to defend them and were, for this campaign of only negative value. A bombardment of Hango, the Gibraltar of Finland, was made

by the cruiser "Kirov" and was probably only a demonstration to keep troops there, for to take it by naval action was impossible. Reports that the cruiser was sunk and later that it was severely damaged, proved to be untrue.

In the far north, in a temperature of 20 degrees below zero, a Red division captured Petsamo in the first few days after a small resistance by the Finns. The Red Army used searchlights for the 23 hours of darkness, and they also employed light tanks built especially for use in snow. This division moving further south then captured the nickel mines, which were due to be set in operation in the next few months. Before retiring, the Finns did considerable damage to them, but when the district with the mines were given back to Finland at the end of the war, the Soviet Government had put them in working order again.

From Petsamo to the nearest railway terminus at Rovaniemi, in Finland, runs the so-called Arctic railway of 250 miles of poorish road, and down this road the Red division pushed for some 60 to 80 miles. The first objective of this division was to prevent the use of the port of Petsamo, the only Finnish Arctic port, by any foreign naval power. A British naval force was reported to have been seen in these waters on February 22nd, 1940, but Mr. Chamberlain stated in Parliament that the undertaking of any action in that region was too hazardous.

The second task of this division of the Red Army was to draw off as many of the enemy forces as possible up the Arctic highway and keep them occupied far from their base. This Red division was intended to appear as a threat to the "waist-line" railway to Sweden, and this it evidently succeeded in doing for the fighting moved back and forth some 60 miles south of Petsamo to Nautsi, throughout the campaign. The Finns found orders on a dead Soviet officer, in the later fighting round Salla, to the effect that the two advances, from Petsamo and from Salla, were to effect a junction and occupy the railway from Sweden. But it should have been obvious to Mannerheim that, in the intense cold and only one hour of daylight, no movement over these long distances of barren north Finland could have any weight behind them to make them a success. On this extreme north sector nothing further developed except an active defence by the Soviet troops right up to the very last stages of the war.

The other preliminary opening move by the Red Army was on the Karelian Isthmus, where Meretskov attacked at once the forward zone of the Mannerheim Line, to clear it for freedom of manoeuvre and to give space to accumulate his troops, arms and stores for the main offensive two months later. By December 6th this zone was occupied by the Red Army, and two days later this army was in contact with the second zone, the

main defence system of the Mannerheim Line. This move had been so swift that success had been achieved with relatively few casualties for the Red forces. These had been caused mostly by land mines and tank traps which had been laid in profusion by the Finns. The Red forces then proceeded to contact and search for any weak spots in the main zone. This fighting pressure had to be kept up, for in no other way could be obtained the vital information of the weak points of the Mannerheim Line, and this was essential for the final plan for the main assault.

The second phase of the campaign now emerged from the first. The threat to the "waist-line" railway from Sweden through Tornio-Oulu-Kontiomaki-Nurmas-Joensuu-Sortavala appeared, when on December 6th, four invading columns of Red forces advanced across the eastern frontier of Finland.

The first invading column, probably an infantry division (a Red infantry division is 18,000 strong), was a thrust based on Kandalaksha on the Murmansk Line. Its aim was the Finnish railhead of Kemijarvi and it captured Salla on December 6th. The communication to its base 125 miles away must have been difficult, for there was two feet of snow on the ground and the lakes were not frozen enough at that time to allow vehicles to cross.

The second thrust of probably the same strength, with its main base at Kemi, on the Murmansk Line, had its railhead at Uhtua, a branch line of 100 miles from Kemi. This invading column advanced from Uhtua across a tractless country of lakes and forests, about 50 miles, and took Suomussalmi on December 10th.

The third thrust of a division with its railhead at Vozozero, on the Murmansk Line, had its advanced base at Repola, some 120 miles without roads from the railhead. Its objective was Lieska.

The fourth thrust was combined of two invading columns, of a division each, both based on Petrozavodsk on the Murmansk railway and each with roadless communications of some 70 to 80 miles. The northern of these two columns advanced on Suajarvi, which it took on December 11th. The southern one advanced to the north shore of Lake Ladoga and took Salmi on December 10th. The next day it took Pitkaranta, further west.

All these four Red thrusts, together with the force at Petsamo, which was afterwards supplied by sea from Murmansk, had to be supplied from the various railheads on the one railway, the Leningrad-Murmansk line. All their communications with their respective bases were roadless, over difficult country and in a very difficult climate. The further these advances went the more their difficulties increased, especially for the mechanised forces, for snow conditions would increase the consumption of fuel considerably. *The Times* stated on December 8th: "It is hard to see

how a large force could advance successfully from the Murmansk railway. The Arctic campaign is being waged in a snowbound area completely cut off from rail communications." This seems a correct deduction, but was forgotten later, smothered by journalist "inflation" news.

Now Meretskov's plan was to make these thrusts, feigning to cut Finland in two, appear so real that the Finns would use their reserves and keep them in those areas in the north long enough for the main offensive on the Mannerheim Line to develop, at the end of January. Subsequent events show how the plan was successful. Even after the main offensive on the Karelian Isthmus had begun in February, some military correspondents in England still thought this offensive was a feint, and that the real weight of the offensive would come through these thrusts for the Finnish "waist-line."

In order that these feint attacks should not lose in vitality, it is probable that only the commanders of each force were informed of the true intentions. This would prevent the thrusts from being faint and half-hearted and thus failing completely in their purpose.

The Finnish High Command at once despatched some reserves from the south to meet these threats, and a war of movement swayed to and fro on the different lines of advance for some days with varying successes. But the Red forces maintained their positions on the previously named places and consolidated them for further advances. Forward detachments were pushed out in all directions. The Finns counter-attacked, but in spite of these, Red pressure was maintained all the time and even occasional advances were made. During this period the Red Air Force had been little used, owing to the poor flying weather.

By December 21st the bitter cold spell which was moving across Europe, reached Finland and the Red thrusts became more static. The tanks clustered together in the various detachments and became perimeter forts. The roads to supply the fighting troops had to be made by watering the snow, though this surface would only stand up for short periods to the heavy loads. Supply columns, by running six abreast, eased the strain on these roads, but even then they had to be continually remade. Tanks with air propellers were used on the snow—one of the novelties the Soviet Army produced. A few amphibian tanks were tried out on the yet unfrozen lakes, but the temperature fell steadily, and snow and blizzards continued for weeks. Few who do not know life under these Arctic conditions can realise that to touch any metal with the bare hand is impossible and this fact must have added difficulties to both sides, but especially to the Red divisions which are so highly mechanised. The temperature dropped to 54 degrees in the north and, according to one Finnish correspondent,

touched 100 degrees below. The winter was certainly the coldest Finland had experienced for 70 years. For the first time in military history armies continued active operations in such a climate.

Meanwhile, during this period, the Red Army was bringing strong pressure to bear on the Mannerheim Line, and the first real bombardment of the war is recorded. This pressure brought out much valuable information of the strength of the various parts of the Line, information that can only be obtained accurately by actual fighting. The strength of the Finnish left was revealed at Taipale and along the Vuoksi waterway. The left centre of the Finnish Line was pressed back to Moulua, and though weaker than the extreme left, yet this sector, hilly and heavily wooded, was strongly held. The next, the right centre of the Finns, which afterwards became known as the Summa front, was found to be the weakest, both geographically and militarily. It was more open, and free of the many lakes and water systems which tended to break up the attack approaches. The extreme right sector was very strong and was protected by the fortress of Koivisto on the Gulf of Finland.

This continual pressure, carried on in late December and early January, gave the information on which Meretskov based the details of his plan for the final major operations, the big offensive. The weather, which had been such a hindrance in the north of Finland, was much clearer in the south, although according to the accepted standards of warfare it was not weather that commanders would choose for active operations.

By December 24th, 1939, snow was falling heavily on all fronts. On Christmas Day the Finns launched their first attack, from Lieska, with some success, and from this date onwards the Finnish Army took the offensive and attacked all four thrusts of the Red Army in the northern area of operations. These harassing movements, mostly at the lines of communications, were carried on, with varying degrees of success, right up to the opening of the Red offensive on the Karelian Isthmus on February 1st.

The Red detachments were in most cases besieged, and though they held their main positions, they often sustained fairly heavy losses. This was particularly so in the Suomussalmi area, and although the losses did not reach the figures sent out by correspondents, they were heavy. The Red division in this area lost 1,500 men taken prisoner, according to figures issued by the Finns at the end of the war. General Wallenius, who was in command of the Finnish troops in the north, an ex-journalist himself, evidently put no restraining hand on the glowing reports sent out by correspondents over these local victories. The result was that

the press in England became so exuberant that even the possibility of Finland defeating the Soviet Union was seriously discussed.

The Red Army has been criticised for using heavily mechanised forces in such a climate and on such unsuitable terrain. There would appear to be some justice in this, in view of the comparatively heavy losses of tanks in these northern thrusts. But it may well be the fault lay not so much in the use of this form of warfare as the failure of the fuel in such climatic conditions. The Red authorities had had vast experience in all their great projects in the Arctic and at the Pole, of the need for "doctoring" oil and petrol for aeroplanes and land machines. If they had taken the average temperature of these parts for the last fifty years, they would have "doctored" their fuel supply for a temperature of 25 degrees below zero. But when in this late December it dropped a further 25 degrees, this special fuel would fail. The fuel "doctored" to this new condition would be neither at their base nor railhead and could never be brought up from Murmansk or Leningrad in time. This would account for the sudden immobilising of their tank columns, thus leaving them an easy prey to the guerilla tactics of their Finnish infantry opponents. This failure to be prepared for the exceptional weather may be the reason, if not the excuse, for the losses. But it does not prove that the use of mechanised forces here was wrong. It was the vital part of the Red Army plan to give the impression of real weight in these thrusts, and mechanised units, not just infantry, were an imperative part of the plan. The losses naturally increased the elation of the Finns and so tended to aid Meretskov's plan of deception.

By January 6th, 1940, the Finns had come to the conclusion that the Red Army had abandoned all attempts at further advances and were digging in on all fronts. On this day Viborg, the headquarters of the Mannerheim Line, was bombarded by long-range artillery with a new type of shell, and also tanks of 33 tons, armed with three guns and two machine-guns, made their first appearance with the Red Army. There was 22 degrees of frost on the Karelian Isthmus and the ice was strong enough on the sea and on Lake Lagoda to bear troops, if not heavy tanks. The Finnish High Command was now very confident, for what they feared most, the "waist-line" threat, was being held, though they showed some uneasiness at the thrust on the northern shore of Lake Lagoda. This, they thought, if developed heavily, might threaten to turn the whole Mannerheim Line.

The third phase of the Red plan of operation now began. The Red air fleet launched a series of continuous attacks on the lines of communications of the Finnish armies. This included all military objectives behind the enemy lines. This phase of air

operations was carried on from the first week in January until February 22nd, when, its mission completed, the air force was taken off this task and put on to the work of supplementing the artillery bombardment of the Mannerheim Line. It is of interest to note that, in spite of the lurid reports of the correspondents, in this aerial activity of over six weeks, and it was very intense, the total number of civilians killed throughout the campaign was, according to Finnish sources, only 646.

The Red air force had, of course, not only overwhelming superiority in numbers, but also in quality. They evidently did not use their latest models probably in case any should fall into enemy hands. One military correspondent actually stated that the Reds had no de-icing system on their machines for Arctic weather . . . this in the face of the facts that Soviet 'planes have not only landed at the North Pole but flown over it to America some three years ago. According to American newspaper correspondents, no 'planes sent from abroad to the Finns came up to the level of the Soviet machines. This is confirmed by the fact that such machines sent by the Powers to Finland, and which fell into the hands of the Red Army during the campaign, were handed over to the Chinese Republican armies fighting Japan.

Leningrad, which had so many military objectives, not the least of which was the one railway bridge over the Neva carrying all the men and material for the Red Forces fighting on the Karelian Isthmus, was never bombed, though so very close to the front line. How they have managed to deal with the night bomber has not been disclosed. In fact, the Soviet air force seemed to have complete mastery of the air in the whole campaign.

The mass descent by parachute and the use of air-borne armies for which the Red Army is famous, and which the German Army has endeavoured to emulate, can only be used in a war of movement on a large scale. It was quite impossible to employ this tactic in this small campaign which was entirely one of position or siege warfare. A few parachute patrols were sent out occasionally. Otherwise the only task of the parachute was for feeding and supplying isolated detachments.

All through the month of January the Red thrusts at the "waist-line" were still active, and this in spite of the Finnish successes on their lines of communication, *i.e.*, on the road parts, for they never reached or damaged the Murmansk railway. Even up to the end of January military correspondents in England were still using the term "cutting Finland in two" and were still under the impression that the main danger to Finland was from these thrusts. Meretskov's plan of concealing the true direction of his main blow was evidently succeeding.

In the last days of January he put the finishing touch to the

deception by staging a vigorous attack with his 18th Red Division and the 54th Red Tank Brigade along the north shore of Lake Ladoga. The fierce six-day battle which took place confirmed the impression of the Finnish High Command that the Red Commander was shirking an issue on the Mannerheim Line itself and was trying to turn it from the north. Mannerheim sent some reserves to deal with this move of the Reds and the fighting went on in this battle for many days in February, with considerable success for the Finns, even during the great offensive of the Red Army on the Karelian Isthmus. The two divisions sent up from their reserves by the Finns were desperately needed later on.

Now opened the fourth and final phase of the war—the great offensive on the Mannerheim Line. On February 2nd, 1940, after a heavy bombardment of artillery, supplemented from the air, the full weight of the infantry attack was launched on the Finnish right centre sector of the Mannerheim Line, the Summa front, of a width of some ten miles. Tanks and troops advanced under a heavy smoke screen. Infantry used armoured sledges, 9 feet long and 6 feet wide with machine-guns, and these were pushed forward over the snow by tanks. 130 heavy bombers and many pursuit 'planes co-operated. Such positions as the Red troops managed to gain had to be consolidated by blasting the frozen ground with dynamite, for the digging of the new trenches was impossible. This was the first action in which British bombing 'planes were used on the side of the Finns.

This sudden mighty onslaught was still regarded by one military correspondent in England as a diversion, so obsessed had he become over the threatened "waist-line." But the attack developed in the next and following days, and increased rather than slackened in intensity. At last the true significance of the Red plan of operations began to dawn on the Finnish High Command. But it was too late. The reserves, except the local ones, were now dispersed all up north of Lake Lagoda along the threatened railway. The condition of the railways under the continuous air bombardment made it impossible for General Wallenius to send any of his spare troops back. The troops on the Mannerheim Line had to fight it out with only local reserves.

On February 3rd, in a temperature of 30 degrees below zero, the Red attack was resumed after a six-hour barrage of artillery. Day after day these attacks continued, apparently without a hitch, until the line of the Finns started to sag, to be dented, to crumble. Always the main weight was on the same Summa sector, though all the time along the whole Mannerheim Line heavy pressure of artillery and infantry was kept up. Especially was this so on the left sector of the Finns at Taipale, for this was the hinge which had to be pinned down to its position and held there throughout

the whole offensive. On all the northern fronts the Red forces kept active, but on the north shore of Lake Ladoga the Finns attacked with vigour and success the Red 18th division and the tank brigade with it. However, not even the defeat of these units could divert Meretskov from his purpose—the destruction of the Mannerheim Line.

By February 8th the Finns gave ground slightly and the Summa front was dented. Two days later the Red advance captured the fortress of Kotinen, with eight big gun emplacements and five other gun emplacements, on the Finnish left, where they were being firmly held down. The Finnish High Command called this claim by the Moscow communiqué “fantastic and ridiculous,” but now Mannerheim himself tightened up control of the Finnish censorship. The enthusiasm of the correspondents was doing the Finnish cause harm by announcing so many Finnish “victories.” One report, describing the destruction of the 18th Red division, had a few copies issued, but was withdrawn almost at once.

The speed and weight of the offensive never slackened; on the contrary, it increased, in accordance with the principles of the Red Army quoted earlier. One military correspondent in England estimated that even if the present rate of Red progress could be kept up, it would take the Red Army 100 days to reach Viborg. Another stated that the Finns were not worried about the Mannerheim Line, and thought the “waist-line” offensive would develop again when the warm weather set in.

By February 15th Mannerheim was forced to absorb some of his reserves. The same day the new 70-ton triple turret tanks appeared in the Red attacks. Now for the first time the press fully realised that the decision was to be fought to its final conclusion on the Karelian Isthmus. The Finnish reserves, thrown into counter-attacks, could not stem the onslaught. The next day the Red Army claimed the capture of 32 fortifications and 12 concrete gun emplacements, while the Finnish Command admitted that some positions had been evacuated.

In spite of the intense cold, the offensive continued with all its force. One of the 70-ton tanks was damaged, but the Red troops managed to tow it out of action from the front line back to safety. The shells were pouring on the Finnish positions at the rate of 300,000 a day—as many as the highest number fired by the whole British Army at the battle of the Somme in the last war, but in this case it was concentrated on a ten-mile front only—7,000 tons of explosive metal: in other words, more than three times as much as the German air force dropped on the whole of London area in the first fortnight of the “Blitzkrieg” bombardment of September, 1940.

So complete was the command of the air by the Red air fleet

that not only was artillery observation carried out by aeroplanes, but they were also able to use the artillery observation balloons. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, the biggest tank attack since the last war was launched, but this was not quite accurate, for the Japanese had experienced heavier Red tank attacks when they were defeated in Mongolia. The same newspaper referred to the great skill with which the Red tanks were handled after dusk and at dawn. By now the ice was strong enough to carry tanks, and this was invaluable for the attackers for use on the flanks from the sea, from Lake Ladoga and on inland waters.

Canadian and Polish airmen arrived, and it was about this period, 15th February, that the Finnish Command showed signs of uneasiness about the situation. The next day became one of real anxiety, for the enemy was within 12 miles of Viborg.

By rapid following up, the Red forces gave no respite to the Finns. The pressure was relentless. On February 19th, the Red Army was within four miles of Viborg, while their left wing had reached the coast of Viborg Bay, thus cutting off the powerful coastal fortress of Koivisto, which was now surrounded. This strong right guard of the Mannerheim Line surrendered on February 21st. While the whole swing of the left of the Red attack was now sweeping up to the gates of Viborg, the Red right still pinned the Finnish forces at Taipale to their ground. The object of this pinning was to keep attacking sufficiently strongly to prevent the enemy retiring and extricating himself, but not strong enough to drive him back. This would allow for the wide enveloping movement of the Red left. Some local successes were gained by the Finns on the other fronts, but these were of little value now that the crisis was reaching its climax on the vital Mannerheim front.

On February 22nd the Red Air Force was taken off its task of breaking up the Finnish communications, and was given the single task of supplementing the artillery bombardment of the Finnish defence lines. This co-operation of air and artillery in barrages was first used by the Red Army in their victories over the Japanese. It has since been copied by the German Army. The Finns fought bravely, but were exhausted by lack of sleep and no reliefs. No troops in all history had ever been subject to such a terrific onslaught of metal and men. It was on this day that the Soviet Government asked the British Government to participate in arranging negotiations for peace. Mr. Chamberlain refused. The same day it was reported that British warships were off the northern coast near Petsamo.

But the Finns were now given a short respite, for such a blizzard swept the Karelian Isthmus that from February 22nd to

27th the Red Army was unable to resume the offensive until the later date, when the attack was taken up with unabated vigour.

On February 28th the first British volunteers were reported to be on their way to the front to help the Finns. The same day peace rumours began to appear. The swing of the Red left continued with the occupation of the islands west of the captured fortress of Koivisto, while the pivot on the right at Taipale was riveted firmly by continual pressure. This prevented any orderly withdrawal and any easing of the, by now, almost desperate situation of the Finnish Army, unable to find any reserves for this exhausted right wing. It is true their line was shortened, but in spite of this the crisis of the lack of reserves was acute. Mannerheim could not retrieve the troops he had sent to General Wallenius in the north, owing to the dislocated state of the railways caused by the Red air attacks.

Military correspondents were now expressing admiration of the excellent work of the Red artillery, especially the heavy branch, and were surprised at the speed with which it moved up with the advancing infantry. The Red force on the Isthmus consisted of 14 divisions of infantry, and some idea of the difficulty of rail communications and the necessity for smooth staff work can be gained when it is noted that 30 trains alone are needed for the transportation of one division. The speed of the follow-up of the Red Army surprised the Finnish Command. Much doubt had been expressed outside the Soviet Union as to the capabilities of the Soviet railways to stand up to the strain of war and the movements of mighty armies. This myth was now destroyed. The Murmansk railway carried out the task for all forces of the thrusts north of Lake Ladoga. But more remarkable as a feat of good railway, as well as good staff work, was the supplying of the fighting divisions on the Mannerheim front during the rapid advance. The two railways for this area merged into one over the Neva bridge at Leningrad. At this bottleneck supply trains must have been passing at the rate of at least one an hour throughout the campaign.

February 29th found the Red troops within two miles of the city of Viborg. They now extended their left flank by moving across the ice of the Bay of Viborg and attacking Saklijarvi, which the Finns abandoned. The press gave a spectacular description of the breaking up of the ice by bombardment by the Finns, causing the tanks to collapse through into the sea. This tactic, used by Napoleon once on river ice in Central Europe, would have been quite useless in the Bay of Viborg, for the ice was some four feet thick and would not have given way under bombardment, though naturally shell holes would have been made, round which the tanks could skirt. The Finns having this

local knowledge would have not have wasted their ammunition in such a foolish way, reserving their fire for the real targets, the tanks themselves.

March 1st showed Viborg surrounded on three sides, while the movement of the Red left across the Bay of Viborg was developing ever further and wider sweeps. The Finnish troops, no longer under cover of their defensive system, but exposed in the open, were losing heavily in casualties. The end was obviously approaching.

By March 7th the Red left movements were extending, by attacks further down the coast, and reaching even Kotka, from which a railway runs north to join the main Helsinki-Viborg line. This threatened to cut off the southern Finnish army from its base, for the extreme left of the Red army was now some 60 miles west of Viborg. To achieve this, three landings had been made on the Finnish coast across the frozen sea of the Gulf of Finland, each force marching over 20 to 25 miles of ice.

It now became known that members of the Finnish Government were in Moscow discussing peace terms, and on March 12th, to quote the *Daily Telegraph*, "the Finnish High Command sent message after message to M. L. Ryti's delegation to Moscow, urging peace immediately and at virtually any price."

On March 13th, the Red Army marched into Viborg in the early hours of the morning and the cease fire was sounded at 11 a.m. Peace had been signed in Moscow and a Finnish military catastrophe been avoided. The Red Army had completed its task in 104 days. The thaw set in 10 days later.

The peace terms not only gave the Soviet Baltic Fleet freedom from its cramped position, making it virtually mistress of the Baltic, but this dangerous back door to the Soviet Union was banged, barred and bolted for good.

The losses, given by Molotov and not disputed by the Finns, are as follows. The Finns lost heavily in the final stages:—

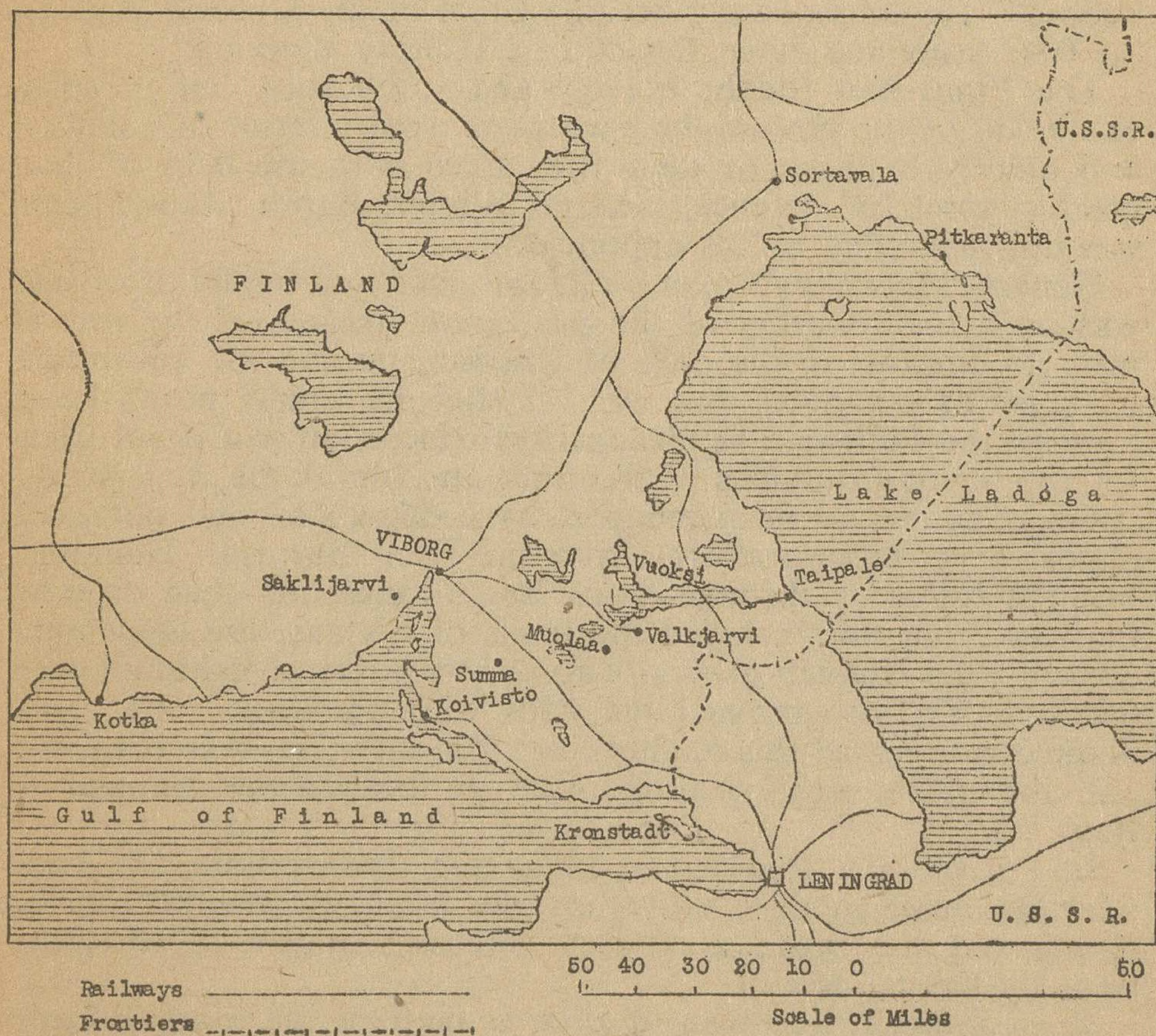
RED ARMY: 48,745 killed or died of wounds; 158,863 wounded.

FINNISH ARMY: 60,000 killed; 250,000 wounded.

These losses are not heavy when it is remembered that unlike other wars there were few periods of inaction, for, except for the period of the blizzards, there was violent fighting on some of the many fronts throughout the campaign. The terrific bombardments and the ingenious methods of infantry approach helped to keep the Red losses in their attacks low, while the Finnish casualties, which were small in the early stages of the defence, rose very steeply in the final fighting in the open.

If the estimation of the Finnish forces as 600,000 is correct, they are very slightly numerically inferior to the Red forces, for Meretskov could have deployed no more troops on the southern

KARELIA ISTHMUS, MANNERHEIM LINE



front, and his railways could carry no more on the northern fronts. The popular notion that wars can be won by sheer numbers is fostered by Hitler's method of referring to military strength by counting heads. Czarist generals in the last war had these ideas when they led the numerous, brave, but ill-armed, Russians against a relatively small, but well trained, German Army, who beat them thoroughly.

For his successful leadership in this campaign, General Meretskov, who, according to press reports had been removed in disgrace, if not shot, was given the highest order the grateful people of the U.S.S.R. could bestow—"Hero of the Soviet Union." He subsequently became Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army and, later, Director of Military Training.

The Finns had fought bravely and stubbornly, but in spite of the aid of the powers their weapons were inferior in quantity and quality to those of their foe. Even with the help of that greatest asset for defence, General Winter, Baron Mannerheim was out-generalled by his opponent.

General Meretskov's plan, well conceived and boldly executed, was on a scale worthy of the past great masters of the art of war. In contrast to the days of Czarism, he had the advantage of superior weapons, but for all that he could never have brought the campaign to this decisive conclusion had it not been for the fighting qualities of the rank and file of the Red Army.

Great commanders in the past have demanded and obtained almost super-human efforts from the men they led. Hannibal brought his army through Spain and France and then crossed the Alps, and this included the tanks of his day, the elephants. Suvarov, the Russian general who in fifty years of fighting never lost a battle, also crossed the Alps with an army. The great Napoleon repeated this mighty feat. But all these were marches, and the actual fighting took place in the warmer climate of Italy.

In Finland the Red Army, in a race against time, achieved what no other modern army has yet dared to attempt, that is it attacked and broke a modern defensive system of fortifications by frontal assault.

The campaign was won in what is perhaps the most difficult terrain in Europe, in a sub-arctic climate and during mid-winter, the severest winter experienced for 70 years.

As a feat of arms it stands out in all history as unique. Only military ignorance or political prejudice would dare to deny it.

London, October, 1940.